

# Agricultural Situation

SEPTEMBER 1957

Vol. 41, No. 9

Agricultural Marketing Service  
U. S. Department of Agriculture

## CURRENT CATTLE DOWNSWING MAY BE CUT-DOWN VARIETY

A cut-down version of the typical downswing phase of the cattle cycle appears to be in prospect for the next few years.

The inventory number of cattle on farms decreased on January 1, 1957, for the first time in 8 years. In all previous cycles a reduction, once begun, lasted several years. This one may last almost as long as those. However, all earlier reductions amounted to 10 to 20 percent or even more. Numbers might go down a good deal less this time.

This seems the most likely outlook indicated by trends to date and by current strong demand for beef and ample supplies of feed. If national employment should drop and demand weaken, or if a severe drought should recur, cattle numbers would drop more than now thought likely and they would be slower to turn upward.

The 1956 drought and low prices brought this year's reduction in the number of cattle and calves on farms and ranches, which amounted to 1.6 million head.

Rains have come and prices are up but the reduction is still going on. In the first half of 1957, only 1 percent fewer cattle and calves were slaughtered commercially than a year before.

Slaughter this fall will be considerably less than the big slaughter of last fall, which was swelled by distress animals from dry areas. Yet the 1957 total may be down only around 2 to 3 percent. Since the 1957 calf crop is estimated as 2 percent smaller, slaughter is clearly still too large for an upturn in numbers. The January 1, 1958, inventory probably will show a further reduction.

Cattle reproduce slowly and investment in cattle is long term. Accordingly, cattlemen do not make decisions impulsively. Add to this the need for restoring ranges and replenishing feed resources, and we have a big reason for the slowness with which downtrends in cattle numbers are reversed.

Moreover, once cow herds are cut and calf crops are reduced, it becomes harder to save back enough young stock to rebuild inventories. Only when heifer calves retained for breeding grow to maturity and calve, may number increases be achieved readily.

Cycle downswings have been getting shorter and smaller. Formerly as long as 10 years, each of the last two were of only 4 years. From 1918 to 1928, numbers were reduced 22 percent. In 1934-38, the cut was 12 percent, and in 1945-49, 10 percent.

Consequently, it wouldn't be surprising if the current downtrend were on an even more diminished scale. The 1.6 million head reduction in numbers on January 1, 1957, was a rather small first-year reduction and numbers probably will fall by no more than 2 million by January 1958.

Economic conditions seem to favor only a small reduction. As population and income have increased, so has the demand for beef, and it may be expected to rise still further. Feed production is ample and a half year's reserve of corn is in storage. Shift of beef cattle production to the east might allow numbers to be maintained better than they would otherwise.

### 1959 Prospects

If cattle inventories reach a low in 1959 or 1960, annual slaughter also would decrease at least that long. Even though average live and carcass weights would be heavier, beef output would fall. With a smaller supply, per person consumption might be reduced as much as 10 pounds from the 85 pounds of 1956.

Assuming no decline in demand, cattle prices would increase, but less pronouncedly than in some previous cycles. Even a consumption figure of 75 pounds would be well above the 56 pounds of 1951. Since feeding volume will continue large, fed-cattle prices might go up least; feeder cattle and calves the greatest, percentage-wise.

This is a considerably improved outlook compared with recent years. Further price gains could be substantial. Even so, advances will not be unbroken and a repeat of the 1950-51 boom is not now in view.

Harold F. Breimyer

*Agricultural Economics Division, AMS*

## 1957 Chickens on Farms May Be Least on Record

The number of young chickens raised on farms in 1957 is expected to be the lowest on record, according to the Crop Reporting Board.

The Board placed the preliminary estimate at 394.3 million young chickens, 18 percent fewer than in 1956.

Every region showed a sharp decrease, ranging from 23 percent in the East North Central States to 8 percent in the South Atlantic States.

Many farmers who raised chickens last year are not doing it in 1957. The decrease is greatest in the small flocks, many of which have evidently been liquidated. Other farmers did not grow any replacements this year, indicating they also may quit raising chickens.

Layers in farm flocks on July 1, 1957, were about the same as a year earlier.

Retention of hens, together with more complete utilization of pullets for layers, is expected to cushion the effect of the sharp drop in the 1957 pullet crop. The laying flock on January 1, 1958, is expected to be 6 to 8 percent smaller than on January 1, 1957.

On February 1, 1957, farmers reported they intended to buy 9 percent fewer chicks than they bought last year. During the first 6 months of 1957, egg prices averaged 22 percent below last year and feed prices 1 percent higher. Farmers actually bought 19 percent fewer flock replacement chicks January through June 1957.

Commercial broiler production is not included in these estimates of chickens raised on farms.

**The Agricultural Situation is sent free to crop, livestock, and price reporters in connection with their reporting work.**

The Agricultural Situation is a monthly publication of the Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. The printing of this publication has been approved by the Director of the Bureau of the Budget (January 16, 1956). Single copy 5 cents, subscription price 50 cents a year, foreign 70 cents, payable in cash or money order to the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C.

# MOVING POTATOES BY FLUME CAN BE CHEAPER, CLEANER

Potato growers handling their own storage problems either directly or through agricultural cooperatives can reduce handling costs by using a flume system to move the potatoes from storage areas to conveyors or elevators feeding onto the packing table.

Marketing Research Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, has found by experimentation at the Red River Valley Potato Research Center that the saving in one season by the flume handling method could be enough to buy the pump and pipe for a flume system.

## Helps Clean Potato

The flume system also helps in removing dirt from the potatoes. This means a better looking potato. The better the potato looks, everything else being equal, the greater the chance of fetching a higher price.

Two cautions: To get the best from the flume system of handling, your operations must be fairly extensive and the distance potatoes have to be conveyed must be fairly long. But if you are doing your own storing or if co-operatives are doing it for you, both of these things are likely to be true.

Here, briefly, is what AMS discovered at Red River Valley:

Flumes cost only \$3 to \$5 per foot. A portable conveyor costs from \$20 to \$50 per foot.

Fluming and elevating potatoes from basement storage to packing equipment caused only 1 percent grade injury. Other methods have caused from 1 to 3.4 percent grade injury.

All handling costs by the flume system amount to only 1.5 cents per hundredweight of potatoes flumed. Other methods cost approximately 5 cents per hundredweight to move them from bulk storage to packing line.

In a typical flume installation one worker only is needed. When other

methods are employed, at least 4 workers—maybe more—have to be used to “fork” the potatoes onto conveyors or into barrels.

Using flume and pump, the dirt clinging to 30,000 bushels of potatoes at the research center was removed at a cost of about \$30. Dirt and trash stored with the same amount of potatoes and left in storage by other handling methods cost \$500 to remove.

The flume system must be so designed that the desired quantities of water and potatoes can be put into the flume—the sluice—at the receiving end, and the potatoes removed and water disposed of at the other end.

The water can then be discharged into a sump and recirculated ready for use again. Soil and trash settle in the sump. However, if your water supply is unlimited, the water can be discharged into a settling field or stream.

The slope and section of the flume must be so arranged that there is neither undue settling of soil and clogging by potatoes nor high velocity to injure the potatoes. The bottom and sides of concrete flumes should be as smooth as possible.

## Pump Method New

Newest method of feeding potatoes into the flume is to use a pump to force the water through a large pipe from the sump to the front of the bin.

A large hose directs the flow of water washing the potatoes into the flume. The flume in the floor of the bin is covered with short planks, removed one at a time as the face of the potato pile moves deeper into the bin.

Marketing Research Reports No. 131 and No. 177 on this subject may be obtained from the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C.

Joseph F. Herrick, Jr.  
*Marketing Research Division, AMS*

# Nursery Products



Sales of 8 classes of nursery products grown by commercial producers in 5 selected States in 1956 are valued at over \$32 million in the initial report of the Crop Reporting Board on operations of the nursery industry.

A pilot survey was undertaken in 5 States—California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, and Iowa—at the request of industry leaders themselves. These leaders hope to use this and future surveys as a guide in production and marketing practices.

## Products Considered

Nursery products included in the pilot study were conifers, broad-leaved evergreens, deciduous shade trees, deciduous shrubs, rose plants, deciduous fruit and nut trees, grape vines, and citrus and subtropical fruit trees.

A new production survey will begin in these and 5 additional States—Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, New York, and Texas—about January 1, 1958.

### Highlights of the pilot report:

Of the total \$32 million in sales, broad-leaved evergreens accounted for \$7.3 million. Second was rose plants with \$6.3 million; then conifers, \$5.6 million; citrus and subtropical fruit trees, \$4.4 million; deciduous fruit and nut trees, \$3.7 million; deciduous shade trees, \$2.6 million; deciduous shrubs, \$2.0 million; and grape vines \$0.3 million.

Nursery products grown or bought and held by growers for 1 or more seasons were considered as being produced. Plants and trees purchased and sold within a season were considered as retail sales and they were not counted in the survey.

Approximately 11 million broad-leaved evergreen plants were grown by producers and sold in the 5 States in 1956. Sales of citrus and subtropical fruit trees were estimated at 3 million trees; conifers at 3.5 million plants; deciduous fruit and nut trees at 6.5 million trees; deciduous shade trees at 1.4 million trees; deciduous shrubs at 3.8 million plants; rose plants at 15.3 million plants; and grape vines at 3.7 million vines.

California, with 1956 sales of the 8 classes of nursery products estimated at almost \$20 million, led the other 4 States. Next came Illinois, \$5 million; Florida, \$4.5 million; Iowa, \$2.5 million, and Colorado, \$0.4 million.

These values represent gross returns to commercial producers for all sales at the wholesale level. Sales of nursery products grown and sold at retail by growers were converted to an equivalent wholesale value, using the average wholesale prices reported for each State.

For the report, a commercial producer was defined as one who produced and sold at least \$1,000 worth of nursery products during 1956. By this definition, Florida had 628 commercial producers of the 8 classes of nursery products surveyed in 1956. California had 577; Illinois, 229; Iowa, 61; and Colorado, 35.

## Extensive Response

Comprehensive reports were received from about two-thirds of the producers who qualified as "commercial." These growers accounted for over 94 percent of the total sales estimated for the 8 classes surveyed.



An important part of the pilot study was to determine the feasibility of obtaining from producers the number of plants they expect to have available for sale during the coming 1957 season.

For the 5 States, nursery stock available for sale in 1957 exceeded 1956 sales by 55 percent for broad-leaved evergreens; 41 percent for citrus and subtropical fruit trees; 39 percent for conifers; 19 percent for deciduous fruit and nut trees; 57 percent for deciduous shade trees; 66 percent for deciduous shrubs; 50 percent for grape vines; and 10 percent for rose plants.

However, these figures on quantities of salable stock should *not* be considered as a forecast of 1957 sales since the carryover of many classes of nursery products each year is rather substantial. Moreover, wastage of bare root stock for some plants and trees is often large.

On the basis of 1956 sales, conifers ranked first in importance in Colorado and Illinois; roses, first in California; citrus and subtropical fruit trees, first in Florida; and deciduous shrubs, first in Iowa.

Sales of conifers, deciduous shade trees, and deciduous fruit and nut trees also were important in Iowa. Sales of deciduous shade trees and deciduous shrubs were high in Illinois. On the same basis, broad-leaved evergreens were an important item in Florida, and virtually all classes of nursery products had large sales in California.

### **Conifer Sales**

Comparing reported sales in 1956 with comparable data for 1949, collected for the Agricultural Census of 1950, showed a 50 percent increase in the sale of conifers in California between those years. In Illinois, conifer sales were up about two-thirds.

Sales of broad-leaved evergreens in Florida were about 3.5 times as great in 1956 as in 1949, while in California the sales were 3 times as great.

Comparing 1956 and 1949, sales of deciduous shade trees were about 2.5 times higher in California. They were up 50 percent in Illinois, but down about

one-third in Iowa. Deciduous shrub sales were down about one-third in Illinois and practically the same in the important producing State of Iowa.

Sales of deciduous fruit and nut trees in California during 1956 were about 3 times as great as in 1949, while sales in Iowa were off about one-third. California reported a 50 percent increase in sales of grape vines and rose plants.

In Florida, citrus and subtropical fruit tree sales were over 3.5 times as great in 1956 as in 1949, while California sales were up about two-thirds.

R. A. McGregor  
*Agricultural Estimates Division, AMS*

## **Men Prefer Cotton For Summer Wear**

Cotton clothes for summer wear are popular among men, mostly because of the coolness of cotton, an Agricultural Marketing Service survey says.

More than 2,300 men living in various sections and representing a great many occupations reported in the fall of 1956 that they owned more summer sport shirts, business dress shirts, walking or Bermuda shorts, swim trunks, or summer slacks made of cotton than of any other one fiber.

Here are the exact figures on those who owned cotton:

For business dress shirts, 99 percent; summer sport shirts, 95 percent; walking or Bermuda shorts, 77 percent.

For swim trunks, 57 percent owned cotton, 15 percent nylon, 14 percent rayon; summer slacks or separate trousers, 48 percent had cotton, 28 percent rayon, and 27 percent wool. In all cases, the total was more than 100 percent because a great many men named more than 1 fiber.

While coolness was the major reason for buying cotton clothes, a great many men did so because these clothes are easily laundered. Others mentioned durability and general appearance.

## WHEAT STOCKS MAY BE CUT ONCE MORE IN 1957-58

The outlook for wheat is for a further reduction in the very large carryover on July 1, 1958, and possibly another cut by July 1, 1959.

Carryover stocks at the beginning of the 1957-58 marketing year on July 1, 1957, were 905 million bushels. This was 128 million less than the July 1, 1956, carryover. The reduction had been made by the largest wheat exports in U. S. history—547 million bushels.

### Current Crop

The 1957 crop was estimated on August 1, 1957, at 915 million bushels, 82 million bushels below the 1956 production. The crop, plus July 1, 1957, carryover and likely imports of about 8 million bushels make a total supply of 1,828 million bushels, 211 million less than last year's record.

Domestic use for food, seed, and feed in 1957-58 is again expected to take around 600 million bushels. If exports should total about 400 million bushels, the carryover July 1, 1958, would be about 830 million bushels. This would be 75 million bushels below the carryover of July 1, 1957, but above that of any other year before 1954.

The average price to farmers may again be about at the national support level of \$2 per bushel.

Prices since April have adjusted down seasonally and in August were generally below effective support levels, except in the Pacific Northwest. Large quantities of new-crop wheat will again be placed under support, and prices will strengthen as the season advances.

The Soil Bank goal for the 1958 crop is to take 7 to 9 million acres out of production. If moisture is favorable, the number of farmers participating will be smaller. Drought at seeding time would encourage farmers to put land in the Soil Bank.

If 8 million acres do go into the Soil Bank, about 53 million acres may be

planted, up 3.3 million from this year. Average yields on this acreage would produce about 850 million bushels, about 65 million bushels smaller than production in 1957 and the smallest since 1943.

With domestic disappearance estimated at 600 million bushels, a crop of 850 million bushels would provide only 250 million bushels for export. Since exports are likely to be larger, a further carryover reduction is possible by July 1, 1959.

Two important changes have been made in acreage reserve provisions for 1958. First, a total crop acreage figure will be established for each farm. This "Soil Bank base" will be calculated primarily upon past acreage of each farm. Total harvested acreage in 1958 will be held below the "base" by the equivalent of the number of acres placed in the Soil Bank.

This "Soil Bank base" provision has been in effect in the conservation reserve since the beginning of the program. In 1958, the "base" also will apply to the acreage reserve.

The second change is that total acreage reserve payments in 1958 for all commodities to any one producer will be limited to \$3,000.

### Sign-up Deadline

The sign-up period for winter wheat closes on October 4. Farmers who have an "old farm" wheat acreage allotment for 1958 and who normally grow winter wheat will be eligible to sign an acreage reserve agreement with their county ASC committee.

The national average rate for the 1958 acreage reserve will be \$20.88 per acre, with available wheat price supports averaging \$1.78 per bushel. The comparable rates for 1957 are \$20.04 per acre and \$2 per bushel.

Robert Post  
*Agricultural Economics Division, AMS*

## 1957 LAMB CROP DOWN 3 PERCENT FROM 1956

The 1957 lamb crop totaled 19.8 million head, 3 percent less than the 20.4 million head raised in 1956, according to the Crop Reporting Board. This is the smallest lamb crop since 1953. However, it just about equals the 1946-55 average.

Drought, which forced liquidation of breeding flocks, was the principal cause for the 5-percent reduction in the lamb crop in the 13 Western States (this includes South Dakota and Texas).

In Texas, the leading sheep State, the 1957 lamb crop of 2.3 million head is 14 percent less than in 1956 and 24 percent below average.

The lamb crop in the 35 native sheep States is 1 percent larger than in 1956 and 11 percent above average.

The lamb crop percentage is 94. This percentage is based upon the number

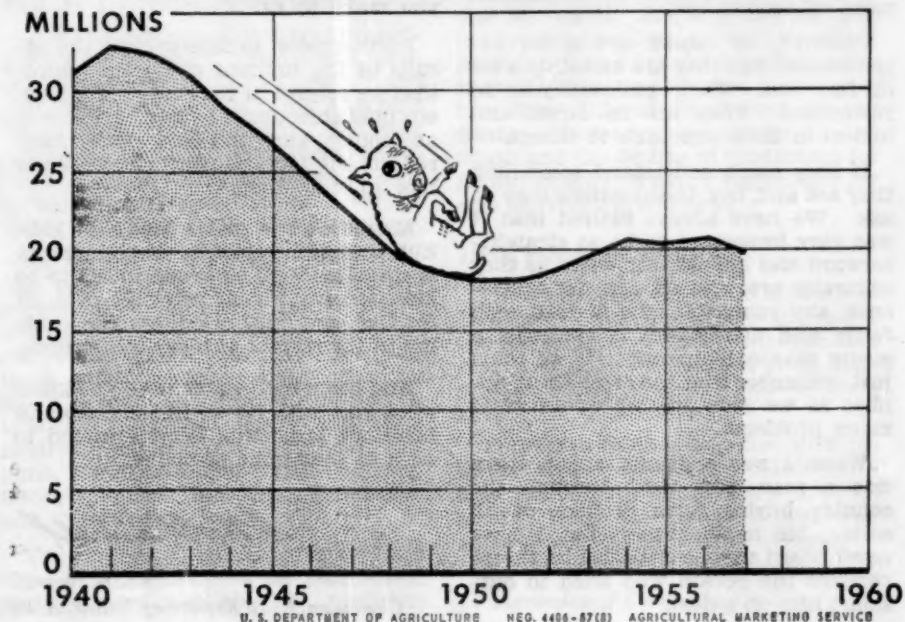
of lambs saved per 100 ewes 1 year or older on farms and ranches on January 1, 1957. This year's figure is 1 point below the record percentage of 95 for 1955 and 1956. The 1946-55 average is 89. Percentage this year is below that of 1956 in all except the West North Central region.

In the 13 Western States, the number of breeding ewes 1 year old and over on January 1, 1957, was 4 percent below that of 1956. However, the number was up 2 percent in the native States.

In Texas, due to continued severe drought, the number of breeding ewes was 11 percent below that of January 1, 1956. The Texas lambing percentage of 72 compares with 75 in 1956 and the Texas average of 69.

Emmett B. Hannawald  
*Agricultural Estimates Division, AMS*

### U. S. LAMB CROP



## *"Bert" Newell's* **Letter**

Well, sir, we have really had a time around our house—a good time, I mean. My daughter and her family came for their annual visit, and with Mike, 7, Jimmy, 5, and little Mary, 4, the joint was jumpin'.

The boys like to play "Going hunting" and when they do they usually try to assign Mary the part of being a woodchuck or some other game. About half the time she would much rather play with her dolls.

One evening, I saw Mike and Jimmy struggling along with Mary suspended between them like a hammock. She was supposed to be a dead bandit.

Everything went as planned until they had to put her down for a moment. Then, like a streak of lightning, she grabbed the sheriff's six-shooter and was off with the sheriff and his posse in hot pursuit. From the barrage of bang-bang's and pow-pow's that little Mary laid down, I figure the sheriff came off second best.

Children, of course, are a big responsibility but they are certainly a lot of fun, too. Their philosophy is so refreshing. They are so direct and honest in their approach to things.

If they don't understand something they ask and, boy, the questions they do ask. We have always figured that it was very important to be as straightforward and honest with them as they naturally are with us. In my experience, any youngster who is dealt with fairly and aboveboard is generally a pretty reasonable person. If we could just remember that the same thing applies as we grow up, we would avoid many problems.

When I was a county agent, there was a man who went through the country buying farm produce of all sorts. He made money, but I have never heard anyone criticize him except perhaps the person who tried to outsmart him on a deal.

Most of the farmers used to say "Just trust Doc and you'll come out all right." I was in position to check up on some of his deals and I never found a time when Doc didn't live up to his agreement. In several cases, where things turned out a little better than he had expected, he went back to the farmer and gave him the benefit of the better break.

In our work, I'm reminded of Doc and his simple, honest way many times in the course of a crop season. Every now and then someone raises the question as to how we know we get the right information from our voluntary correspondents.

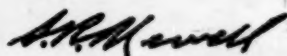
All I know is that for nearly a hundred years we have worked hand in hand with our voluntary reporters and time and time again the composite results of the information they furnish have checked out very closely when the final count is made. So I conclude they give us the facts as accurately and honestly as they can.

We, on our side, certainly feel a very great responsibility to live up to this sort of confidence. We adhere strictly to our pledge to you that we will not divulge the contents of any report that you make to us.

Furthermore, in interpreting the results of the millions of questionnaires that we receive in the course of a year, our only objective is to give back to you an honest and unbiased report that reflects the facts as nearly as we know how to state them.

Maybe we are just a bunch of kids. But, if straightforward, simple honesty is childlike, we'll be proud to try to be kids, anyway. That principle paid off for Doc, not only in dollars and cents but in the respect of his fellow citizens.

And come high water (and you know what goes with it) we in the Crop and Livestock Reporting Service intend to stick to that same principle.



S. R. Newell  
Chairman, Crop Reporting Board, AMS



# SWEETPOTATO CROP APPEARS LOWEST SINCE 1952

The smallest sweetpotato crop since 1952 is in prospect for this year. It is estimated to be 5 percent below the 1956 figure and down a fifth from the 1949-55 average.

Plantings in all States total only slightly below the acreage in 1956. But the 1956 acreage was the smallest in 6 years. It was down sharply in all major producing areas.

Prices in 1957 are likely to rise only moderately above those of the previous season and the average. Moderate price levels have accompanied the fall-off of consumer demand for sweetpotatoes in recent years. Supplies in the 1956-57 season were relatively small, but prices averaged only slightly above 1949-54.

## Acreage Cuts

Substantial acreage cuts this year in a number of big producing States more than offset a 6 percent increase in North Carolina, the second largest producer, and increases in California, Kansas, Maryland, and Virginia.

However, Louisiana, the most important producer, has 7 percent less acreage for harvest than last year. Some acreage was replanted after washouts from heavy rains during hurricane "Audrey." Acreage cuts, moderate to substantial, occurred in several other important producing States: Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, and Tennessee.

Early season estimates indicate a 1957 production of 16 million hundredweight. Increased output is expected in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kansas, Texas, and California. However, these gains are more than offset by sharp production declines expected in Louisiana and New Jersey and more moderate reductions in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Oklahoma.

The smaller output in Louisiana and New Jersey is likely to cut supplies of sweetpotatoes available in northern

markets during the late winter and spring of 1958.

Prices to growers this season are likely to be up moderately from those a year earlier. They were high for the small early receipts. For the week ended August 24, U. S. No. 1 Puerto Rican type sweetpotatoes brought about \$5.70 per hundredweight, f. o. b. southwest Louisiana shipping points. This compares with \$5.34 per hundredweight a year earlier.

As marketings increase, prices are expected to show the usual seasonal decline into fall. From the fall low, prices should advance as marketings decline seasonally into next spring.

Production and acreage alike have declined sharply since World War II. Total plantings have dropped from an average of 735,000 acres in 1939-44 to 291,000 acres in 1956. Although yields have increased somewhat, production during the same period has fallen from an annual average of almost 35 million hundredweight to less than 17 million.

Sharpness of the cuts apparently is due to smaller demand and to such production problems as need for much hand labor and careful handling after harvest. The sweetpotato weevil also has been difficult to control in the South. Increasing prosperity in the South and the decline of production for home use are also partly responsible for cuts in overall production.

## 1956 Plantings Reduced

Plantings were cut back sharply in 1956 largely because of low prices for the 1955 crop. Planted acreage last year was down 17 percent from 1955 and 60 percent from the 1939-44 average.

This large decline, together with reduced yields, resulted in production of only 16.9 million hundredweight, down a fifth from the previous year and about one-half the 1939-44 average.

Will M. Simmons

*Agricultural Economics Division, AMS*

# GOOD USDA CROP REPORTERS KNOW LANGUAGE OF PLANTS

Crop forecasts are not made with a crystal ball. They have solid scientific bases.

Crop reporters—working farmers—keep the Crop Reporting Board posted on prospects by sending monthly reports to the State Agricultural Statisticians. Sometimes the Board asks for "condition" and sometimes for "probable yield."

But, no matter how it is worded, the plant itself must tell the story—the job is in understanding the language of the plant. To the crop reporter and forecaster this means knowing what to look for.

## Fruit Counts

Convinced that more detailed study of plant characteristics on any forecast date during the growing season might lead to a better forecast, statisticians of the Crop Reporting Board and its field offices for the past few years have been making fruit counts on cotton, corn, wheat, and soybeans throughout the growing season.

On hundreds of fields in the principal producing areas, field workers have measured off small sections of the crop and kept an eagle eye on everything that the plants were doing.

Prying into the private lives of the plants in this way confirms what the Board long suspected: The plant knows fairly early in the season what it is going to do and then does so, barring some unusual calamity.

When fruit counts are made on any crop early in the season, different fields are in various stages of maturity. The first step in a yield forecast is to count the fruit already present and to make an estimate of the amount still to come, if the plants do not yet have their full load. This means that we have to know what fraction of a full load is represented by the fruit count on a given date.



That fraction depends upon the plant's stage of maturity. The Crop Reporting Board's statisticians have learned a great deal about the relationship of a plant's stage of maturity to the fraction of a full fruit load that is being carried at that stage. The particular plant observations that are used in identifying these stages of maturity vary from crop to crop but the principle is the same for all.

## Problems of Checking

In addition to knowing how much fruit will be produced by the average plant, it is also necessary to know how much of that fruit will reach maturity and how much mature fruit will be lost in normal harvesting operations.

Here we have to depend upon experience. Nevertheless, if nothing out of the ordinary happens, the percentage loss seems to be about the same from year to year. Consequently, allowance can be made for it in the forecast.

Still another factor must be taken into account in working out a yield forecast by this approach. It is fruit size, as reflected by average weight of cotton per boll or average weight of grain per ear for corn. This is a measurable quantity when the crop is far

enough along, but early in the season it must also be forecast.

For cotton, the weight per boll seems to be high in years when the full fruit load is high, and vice versa. A similar relationship should also hold true for other crops.

If fruit size is related to fruiting potential, we have a principle for forecasting fruit size, because the total fruit load can be forecast early in the season from current fruit counts and the maturity classifications of plants.

As the evidence comes in, it looks more and more as though the plant already knows early in the season what its future is going to be.

In Florida, California, and Oregon, forecasters have been working along the same lines with tree fruits and nuts—oranges, grapefruit, peaches, pears, and filberts, for example. The situation there has been somewhat dif-

ferent because the first counts are not made until all fruit has set. But it is still necessary to forecast the size that the fruit will attain by harvest, how much will fail to reach maturity, and how much will be passed by in harvesting.

Size at maturity is now being forecast by making size measurements periodically and projecting the trend to expected date of harvest. The amount of fruit dropping from the trees is also counted at intervals. Under usual conditions, losses of fruit between the date of the counts and harvest time seem to be fairly constant from year to year.

Of course, we haven't got all the answers yet, but plant language is a fascinating subject to study and one that should be very useful when we learn all the words.

Walter A. Hendricks  
*Agricultural Estimates Division, AMS*

## Dealer Field Seed Stocks 6 Percent Less in 1957

Dealers throughout the Nation held 234.2 million pounds of 38 kinds of field seeds on June 30, 1957, according to a survey just completed by the Crop Reporting Board. This is 6 percent less than on June 30, 1956.

The current stocks do not include farmers' holdings for which figures will be available later in the year. For the first time in 8 years no seed was held by the Federal Government.

Here is the comparison between 1956 and 1957:

Down more than 50 percent from 1956—lupine, slender wheatgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, smooth bromegrass, and red fescue.

Down 25 to 50 percent—tall fescue, crested wheatgrass, Chewings fescue, sweetclover, birdsfoot trefoil, timothy, meadow fescue, and other millet.

Down 10 to 25 percent—Korean lespedeza, other vetch, Ladino clover, northern and central origin alfalfa, redtop, and orchardgrass.

Down 9 percent—alsike clover.

Down 7 percent—crimson clover.

Close to 1956—Austrian winter peas and other lespedeza.

Largest of record—common and perennial ryegrass, bentgrass, Merion Kentucky bluegrass, and white Dutch clover.

Third largest of record—alfalfa.

About double last year—sorgo (cane), proso millet, and intermediate wheat grass seed.

Up more than 10 percent—Kobe lespedeza, hairy vetch, wild winter peas, red clover, and common vetch.

Crop forecasts for 1957 show mixed trends. Orchard grass (16.5 million pounds) is record high; Kentucky bluegrass (20.5 million pounds, recleaned basis) more than double last year, and Illinois redtop up 12 percent, but tall fescue in South is down 6 percent, and Oregon ryegrass down 19 percent.

Thomas J. Kuzelka  
*Agricultural Estimates Division, AMS*

# Outlook

## Feed Grains

Total supplies in the 1957-58 feeding year are expected to increase slightly to about 179 million tons. Production in 1957, according to August 1 forecasts, will be about the same as a year earlier, but carryover will increase about 5 million tons.

The corn crop is average size and somewhat less than harvest in 1956. Other feed crops, however, will probably better last year's output. Harvest of sorghums is likely to be more than double, oats nearly a fifth larger, and barley up about a sixth.

## Livestock

Smaller supplies for slaughter have pushed prices of all kinds and classes of meat animals above a year earlier. Prospects for a large feed harvest this year and strong slaughter prices in 1958 have brought increased prices for feeder cattle and lambs.

Feeder prices will make little seasonal decline this fall, if fed-cattle prices are as well-maintained as expected and prospects for the corn crop continue favorable. Prices of fed cattle this fall may be more stable than during the fall of 1956. Substantial marketings late this summer and early fall are expected to cause some weakening but a rise is anticipated later in the year.

Hog prices will decline seasonally but promise to hold above 1956 levels until the last few weeks of this year. Prices of lambs should hold above a year earlier and with some seasonal decline.

## Dairy

Milk output in the first half of 1957 was up slightly from first-half production in 1956. Record high output per cow has offset a 1-percent decline in numbers. Total milk supplies in the second half of 1957 should continue above a year earlier. The increase will be supported by plentiful feed grains and an above-average milk-feed price ratio.

## Broilers

Prices this fall are likely to decline from present levels. Midyear increases raised prices to the highest levels so far in 1957 and about equal to a year earlier though marketings were above a year earlier. By mid-October, when demand begins to slacken, marketings are likely to top a year earlier by 8 to 10 percent.

## Cotton

Supplies in the 1957-58 season are likely to be the smallest since 1953-54. This year's crop was estimated on August 1 at about 11.8 million running bales, the smallest in 6 years.

The carryover is down from 14.5 million bales to 11.4 million. The total supply of 23.3 million running bales in the current season compares with the record 27.8 million bales of 1956-57.

Preliminary estimates point to domestic use and export of 13.5 to 15 million bales in 1957-58. This would be enough to reduce carryover stocks further by the end of the current marketing season.

## Potatoes

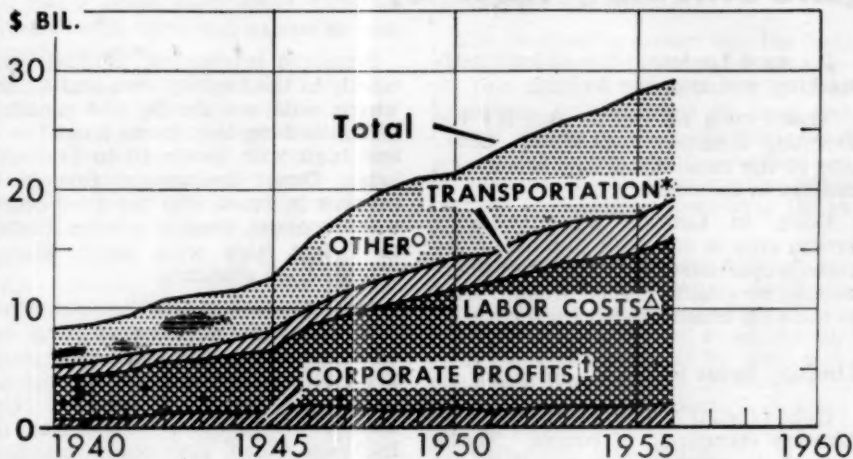
Output for late summer harvest is 7 percent smaller than in 1956, but supplies are better distributed than last year. The fall harvest will be only moderately smaller than last year when large surplus supplies were diverted to starch and livestock feed.

## Vegetables

Output of fresh market vegetables for late summer harvest is expected to decline this year. Unfavorable weather reduced prospective yields along the Atlantic Coast from New England through Virginia. Largest declines are expected for sweet corn, lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, and carrots. Summer cucumbers and green peppers are expected to be in larger supply than a year earlier.



# FARM FOOD MARKETING BILL



\* TOTAL MARKETING CHARGES TO RETAIL STORE LEVEL FOR FARM FOODS BOUGHT BY DOMESTIC CIVILIAN CONSUMERS

○ OTHER COSTS AND NONCORPORATE PROFITS

▲ EXCLUDING TRANSPORTATION LABOR COSTS

† CORPORATE PROFITS (BEFORE TAXES); EXCLUDES PROFITS OF INTERCITY TRANSPORTATION FIRMS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NEG. 3371-57 (7) AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

It took nearly \$29 billion in 1956 to get food products off United States farms and into the retail shopper's carry-home bag. Farmers sent about 4 percent more foodstuffs to market, and average marketing charges per unit of product were up slightly.

All these increases pushed up the total marketing bill last year about 4 percent.

Farmers' prices were slightly lower in 1956 than in 1955, but more products were marketed. So the farmers' share of food expenditures was up \$500 million.

The marketing bill of \$29 billion plus the nearly \$19 billion farm value of food makes up the total retail cost of farm food products in 1956.

What the consumer got with his purchases was processing, convenience, and service. What marketing agencies put into the purchased items were costs of operation.

Wages, salaries, and other charges for labor amounted to \$13.9 billion, compared with \$13 billion in 1955 and

\$8.7 billion in 1947-49. Labor took 48 percent of the marketing bill in 1956, up 1 percentage point from the previous year and up 3 points from 1947-49.

But output per man-hour has risen and labor costs per unit have risen less than wage rates.

Transportation charges in 1956 were estimated at \$3.3 billion, about 11 percent of the marketing bill. This compares with \$3.1 billion in 1955 and with \$2.2 billion in 1947-49. The transportation share was about the same in each period.

Corporate profits before taxes rose from \$1.6 billion in 1955 to \$1.8 billion, 6 percent of the marketing bill in 1956. They have ranged from 6 to 8 percent since World War II.

While the marketing bill has risen in the last decade, the farm value of these foods has fluctuated. Farmers have sold an increasing volume, but prices they received have trended down in most years.

Kathryn Parr  
Marketing Research Division, AMS

## THIS CORN MEANS SOMETHING (BROOMCORN, THAT IS)

It's good Lindsay. It's at least self-working and may run to hurl.

That's corn all right. But it's the everyday language in Lindsay, Okla., one of the most important broomcorn centers in the country.

Down in Lindsay a self-working broom crop is one with just about the right proportion of long and short fibers needed for making a good broom. Hurl is the long brush needed for a cover.

### Lindsay Rates High

Good Lindsay? That means it's up to Lindsay standards, of course. That's enough to know if you are that one farmer in a thousand who enjoys the satisfactions and heartaches of harvesting a broom crop.

The "stick broom" in the housewife's closet represents the end use of the \$10 million broomcorn crop. It sweeps away in the household, then moves to the barn where it is worn down to a nub.

Finally, only the handle is left for swinging away as a flail. In fact, the handle remains useful long after the fibers are swept away. Yes, broomcorn brooms never give up—they are faithful to the last.

Broomcorn belongs to the sorghum family. Its claim to fame is not for syrup or grain but for a brushy head of long, sweeping fibers. Seed branches on the upper third of the head give that extra good sweeping to the new broom.

The crop was first grown commercially near Hadley, Mass., about the turn of the 18th century. Centers of production gradually moved westward and this year Oklahoma is first in production, followed by Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, and Illinois.

It's the rich creek bottoms in the Washita River Valley of south central Oklahoma that produce that "good Lindsay" we were talking about. In Lindsay, broomcorn warehouses line up along the railroad, and dealers' offices face Broomcorn Street.

Standard broomcorn, planted principally in the Lindsay area and Illinois where soils are fertile and moisture generally favorable, grows from 7 to 15 feet high with heads 16 to 24 inches long. Dwarf broomcorn, favored by growers in Texas and the drier southwestern areas, usually is from about 4 to 7 feet high with brush slightly shorter than standard.

Broomcorn is planted in rows 3 to 4 feet wide. In the Lindsay area and Illinois, growers aim at about 4 plants per foot; in the western areas, 2 plants per foot. A bushel of seed will plant from 15 to 30 acres. To spread the harvesting load, plantings are usually staggered, beginning when soils warm up and continuing till nearly mid-July in years when conditions are unfavorable.

Weather conditions in western areas put broomcorn—and its growers—through severe tests. Heavy rains and cloudbursts wash out seeded fields, and replanting 2 to 3 times is common.

Hail damage and blowing soils take a heavy toll. Prolonged drought, blazing high temperatures, and hot winds are prevalent; frequently only the chance of a shower separates complete failure from half a crop.

Still, perhaps this is nature's way of producing a tough, lasting broom fiber.

### Harvesting Difficult

Then comes the harvest which has defied mechanization so far. It requires hand labor and lots of it. It's hard work, not to mention the skin irritation.

There's work for everybody—all the farm men, women, and children, and many town people too, as well as the migrant "Broomcorn Johnnies and Sallies" who move from southern to northern areas as the harvest progresses.

Standard broomcorn is "tabled" and cut from the stalk. Tabling is walking between 2 rows and bending the stalks diagonally across each other, forming a "table" with the heads extending out beyond the rows.

Ordinarily, the harvester cuts the brush immediately after tabling 2 rows across the field. He grasps the brush, pulls the stem against the blade of a special broomcorn knife, and withdraws the brush with its stem without cutting entirely through the boot.

As the brush is cut, it is thrown in small bunches on alternate tables. One man can cut and table an acre of broomcorn in about 15 to 25 hours.

In western districts, shorter standard is either broken over at about waist height and cut, or cut from the standing stalk without breaking. Dwarf brush, attached to the stalk only weakly, is pulled or jerked off at the upper joint. The bunches of brush are either thrown in a pile on the ground or placed between 2 stalks in a row.

Curing, threshing, and baling follow harvest. The brush is placed in layers on slats in sheds to dry except in semi-arid western districts where it is partially cured in the piles and then placed in ricks.

Cured brush is baled either from the shed or from the rick. Considerable care is required to secure uniform, well-made, and attractive bales of brush. The stems must be placed outward, with the butts even at alternate ends of the hopper with the tips of the brush overlapping in the middle. Ordinarily, about 6 bales of brush make a ton.

All that work and not even 16 tons! What does the farmer get?

For the past 10 years, he has harvested an average of 259 pounds per acre for which he received \$354 a ton. Illinois has the highest yields, followed by the Lindsay area.

To market, to market, with a load of broomcorn. Yes, to Lindsay in some cases, but mostly the buyers go to the farm. There the buyer satisfies himself as to color, length of brush, and

other qualities. The short and discolored fibers can be used for the inside of the broom. Pea-green hurl is wanted for the outside.

The progressive grower has the facts on the quality of the crop and the supply and demand situation. The Crop Reporting Service aims to keep the farmer informed as to acreage, yield per acre, and production. It can do so because broomcorn farmers, like other farmers cooperate by answering USDA questionnaires.

These days, broomcorn brooms are facing stiff competition from synthetic fibers, vacuum cleaners, and air filters. Production has declined steadily from an average of around 60,000 tons during World War I to only 20,300 tons in 1956. Drought and reduction in acreage are largely responsible, though, for the very small 1956 figure.

The broomcorn farmer doesn't have to take acreage control or price support programs into consideration. There aren't any.

After a disastrous season the farmer will say he'll never plant broomcorn again. But usually he does.

The superstitious show a deep and unfailing respect for a fallen broom; they never step over it. That's bad luck—but it's good luck to stand the broom up with the fibers "at ease" awaiting the next clean sweep.

There is no substitute for the broomcorn or the handle.

John J. Morgan  
*Agricultural Estimates Division, AMS*

### Farmers' Prices

(1910-14=100)

Date	Prices received by farmers	Parity index <sup>1</sup>	Parity ratio
August 1956----	236	<sup>2</sup> 287	82
July 1957-----	247	295	84
August 1957----	248	295	84

<sup>1</sup> Index of prices paid, interest, taxes, and wage rates.

<sup>2</sup> Revised.

## In This Issue

	Page
Cattle Cycle.....	1
Chickens on Farms.....	2
Moving Potatoes by Flume.....	3
First Report on Nursery Industry.....	4
Men Like Cotton for Summer Wear.....	5
Wheat Stocks May Be Cut.....	6
1957 Lamb Crop Down.....	7
"Bert" Newell's Letter.....	8
Sweetpotato Crop Appears Lowest Since 1952.....	9
Crop Reports Solidly Based.....	10
Dealer Field Seed Stocks.....	11
Outlook.....	12
Marketing Bill up in 1956.....	13
It's Good Lindsay!.....	14
Farmers' Prices.....	15

## Farmer's Share of Consumer's Food Dollar

June 1956.....	41 per cent
May 1957.....	39 per cent
June 1957.....	39 per cent

Permission Is Given To Reprint  
Articles In This Publication

Editor: James M. Buckley  
Assistant: Marcelle Masters

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS  
EUGENE B. POWER  
313 N. FIRST ST.  
ANN ARBOR  
MICH 48106

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID  
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, \$300  
(GPO)